

Basic readings in radical politics and culture

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from *Jump Cut*, no. 18, August 1978, pp. 38-39

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People have often asked us to suggest readings in radical politics and culture for their information or for use in classrooms or study groups. Here we'd like to provide two basic reading lists. One presents an elementary introduction to left political analyses and positions. The other presents a survey of radical perspectives on culture. We've tried to choose material readily available and fairly easy to read. All of these works have been significant in our intellectual development, providing new views on culture and ideology and whole new ways of thinking that have specifically affected how we approach film.

We've synthesized these lists from our own reading and study done with the JUMP CUT staff, political study groups, and courses that we've taught. Surely anyone using these lists will soon discover additional and alternative readings, and teachers and groups should adapt the suggestions here to their own aims and needs. In forthcoming issues we will publish other bibliographies: one on Marxism, art, and cinema and another on feminist cultural perspectives.

In addition to providing these lists, we'd also like to encourage people to pursue a reading project within an informally constituted study group. We ourselves have found that group discussion provides the most valuable experience in mastering and applying these ideas. Although each group has unique characteristics, things have generally run the best for us when one person each time has presented the reading to the group. She or he has sometimes summarized, sometimes raised questions about difficult or controversial points, and sometimes criticized the selection. A discussion that is informal but organized with a chairperson encourages everyone to talk and assures that no one person dominates the process. Finally, we find it most effective to end all our meetings, both work and study sessions, with each person commenting on the process of what happened and how it might be

improved for the next meeting.

SOME BASIC READINGS IN LEFT POLITICS

1. V.I. Lenin, "Karl Marx," and "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," (various editions are available; China Books offers an inexpensive version as the pamphlet "Lenin on Marx and Engels"). "Karl Marx" is the best concise discussion of classical Marxist philosophy, politics, and economics we've seen. Originally an encyclopedia article, Lenin covers every important concept with brevity and accuracy. "Three Sources" sketches the background of Marx's innovation.
2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," (again, various editions are available and China Books sells a very inexpensive one). The most fundamental document, written with astonishing force and clarity; well worth re-reading from time to time, especially after studying the work of other Marxists.
3. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (various; China Books sells a cheap edition). A useful exposition of how Marxism differs from other socialist ideas.
4. Mao Tse-Tung, "On Practice," and "On Contradiction," (both are in the China Books edition of Mao, *Four Essays on Philosophy*). "On Practice" is an excellent basic discussion of the relation of Marxist theory to political action. "On Contradiction" superbly summarizes the basic concept of dialectics.
5. Marge Piercy, "The Grand Coolie Damn," (reprinted in various anthologies of writings from the women's movement such as Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful* and available as a pamphlet from New England Free Press). Piercy's scathing attack on sexism in the New Left is still pertinent to every kind of mixed political work including study groups. The first man who says it's dated should be hooted into silence and made to read all of *Sisterhood is Powerful*.
6. Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness Man's World* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973). Although phrased in an English context, this is an excellent survey of the basic ideas of the feminist movement and a socialist's critique and elaboration of them. If it's used with a group, it can provide material for discussion over several meetings.
7. Stanley Aronowitz, "The Formation of the American Working Class," part two of his book *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1973), pp. 135-395. While lots of radicals, including us, would take issue with Aronowitz about specific topics, he supplies the best brief *critical* overview of US labor and the trade union movement that we've seen.

8. Harold Baron, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism," (New England Free Press pamphlet). An essential work for understanding U.S. racism. Baron details the economic position of blacks in the United States from the first slaves to the present and explains the specific nature of black exploitation.

9. Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1970). Allen describes the conditions leading to the black upsurge in the Sixties and carefully indicates the similarities and differences between reformist, nationalist, and revolutionary segments of the black movement.

10. James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, chapters 1-5 of their *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Monthly Review, 1974), pp. 11-120. Concise and illuminating discussions of how the political revolutions in Russia, China, Guinea-Bissau, and Vietnam were developed from Marx's ideas and in turn made new contributions to the living tradition of Marxist political thought and action.

In addition to the above readings, we'd suggest that anyone beginning or continuing the study of left politics read the movement press to keep up on current news and see the diversity of radical thought.

Seven Days is a non-sectarian left newsmagazine patterned after *Time* and *Newsweek* which suffers a bit from the constraints of "fast food journalism," but which offers incisive political analysis, including fine cultural coverage. Sub: 21 issues for \$12.60, 206 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10010.

The Guardian offers the most extensive national and international news coverage on the left from an independent Marxist-Leninist position (formerly close to China, they are now critical of it). Sub: \$17.00/yr and 6 week trial for \$1.00; 33 W. 17th NY, NY 10011.

Off Our Backs publishes a wide range of news and controversy from the radical wing of the feminist movement and is the best single source of information about what the women's movement is doing. Sub: one year for \$6 (11 issues).

Win serves as a forum for the activist nonviolent left; always good at covering antimilitary activity, right now it extensively discusses and reports on the anti-nuclear movement. Sub: 6 months (weekly) for \$8.00 from 503 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217.

The Militant provides news and analysis from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and its youth branch, the Young Socialist Alliance. Sub: 10 issue trial for \$2.00; \$15/yr (weekly), 14 Charles Lane, NY, NY 10014.

The Daily World is the official newspaper of the US Communist Party:

subs \$12.00/yr from 27 E. Monroe, room 1204, Chicago IL 60603.

In These Times covers the national and international scene from an independent socialist position and tends to the analytic rather than news approach; unhappily the culture coverage is often dismal. Four month trial sub: \$7.75 (weekly), year: \$17.50, student: \$11.50 from 1509 N. Milwaukee, Chicago IL 60622

SOME BASIC READINGS IN RADICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURE

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Literature and Art*. The selection edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski contains an extended introduction by Morawski recapitulating orthodox Marxist aesthetics (\$2.95 from *New German Critique*, German Department, U of WI-Milwaukee, Milwaukee WI 53201). The \$3.25 Progress edition (Moscow, 1976) contains many more writings. Marx and Engels wrote relatively little about the arts and their taste is well within the educated German middle class norms of their day. Morawski attempts to make a systematic aesthetic out of the notes, anecdotes, and passing literary references of the Marxist Masters, but many others believe that in the absence of a systematic presentation by the founders, a Marxist aesthetics is still to be created.
2. V.I. Lenin, five essays on Tolstoi in *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress, 1970), and G. V. Plekhenov, *Art and Social Life* (Moscow: Progress, 1957). Lenin's brief remarks are a model of the kind of criticism practiced by the next generation of Marxists, particularly in describing the progressive and regressive aspects of the Russian novelist and relating that to Tolstoy's class and political position. Plekhanov's pamphlet presents a basic critique of art-for-art's-sake, realism and naturalism in traditional left terms.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1976) and/or Henri Avron, *Marxist Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1973). These two short books give a brief and accurate description of the main trends and arguments in Marxist criticism. Useful for an overview and for understanding the issues at stake in other readings.
4. Mao Tse-Tung, "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art," (China Books), and Leon Trotsky, selections from *Literature and Revolution* in Paul N. Siegal, ed., *Trotsky on Literature and Art* (NY: Pathfinder). Mao summarizes one Marxist tradition on art, the "left utilitarian" one, which holds that committed art must serve the needs of the peasants and workers. Trotsky presents the opposite extreme, seeing little need for party intervention in art.
5. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in his *Illuminations* (NY: Sheeken, 1969) and reprinted in Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism*:

Introductory Readings (NY: Oxford, 1974). And Richard Kazis, "Benjamin's Age of Mechanical Reproduction," JUMP CUT 15. Benjamin tried to deal with the question of mass produced art and mass disseminated culture from a Marxist point of view--an essential foundation to dealing with film. Kazis places Benjamin's interests in perspective.

6. Georg Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism" and "Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann" (chapters 1 and 2 of *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (NY: Harper, 1962) or "The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization" (in his *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971). Lukács is the major orthodox literary theorist of this century, resolutely arguing for realism, for 19th century forms over 20th century experiments, against modernism and formalism.
7. Bertolt Brecht, selections from *On Theatre*, ed. John Willet (NY: Hill and Wang, 1964): "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," "The Popular and the Realistic," "A Short Organum for the Theatre." Brecht is the major unorthodox Marxist figure. He quarreled with Lukács and argued for modern techniques, new forms, and experimentation. He's much more seriously political and communist than bourgeois critics and formalists like to think, and very witty too.
8. Herbert Marcuse, "The New Forms of Control" and "The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation," in his *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964). Marcuse here recapitulates the earlier Frankfurt School argument that advanced capitalist society effectively absorbs any protest. Although very pessimistic about change, the author provides many insights into what's wrong with U.S. life and why.
9. Kate Millett, sections one and two (pp. 11-312) of *Sexual Politics* (NY: Avon, 1971). Specifically discusses literature, but the book forms the foundation of current feminist criticism of all the arts. Excellent as an introduction to or summary of the main concepts of feminist art theory.
10. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (NY: International General, 1975). Produced in Allende period Chile, this study shows how the seemingly innocent form of the Disney comic books sugarcoats an oppressive content. A startling analysis of popular culture in the service of counter-revolution.

Several anthologies, some unfortunately out of print, contain useful selections of Marxist writings on the arts, including some of the above material. Maynard Solomon's *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* is wide-ranging, biased to the US pion Marxism, good

introductions and bibliographies (NY: Vintage, 1974). The Berel Lang and Forrest Williams anthology, *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism* (NY: David McKay, 1972), forms a nice companion, having different but interesting selection. Far behind in third place is the overpriced David Craig, *Marxists on Literature*, a very pedestrian look at the tradition.

Sources: books from China are distributed in the U.S. by China Books, 174.W. Randolph, Chicago IL 60601, and 125 Fifth Ave, NY NY 10003, and 2929 24th St., San Francisco CA 94110. Imported Publications, 320 W. Ohio, Chicago IL 60610 handles books from the Soviet Union. Trotsky's writings are published by Pathfinder Press, 410 West St., NY NY 10014. The Dorfman/Mattelart book on Donald Duck is sold by the *Guardian* newspaper listed above. The Piercy and Baron articles are reprinted by New England Free Press, 60 Union Square, Somerville MA 12143. All of these publishers have catalogues listing other publications. If you don't live near a left bookstore, the newspapers listed above usually carry ads for radical bookstores that do mail order.